



Irish Rural Link

27th July 2023

Twenty percent of Households Aged 65 and over have No Internet Connection

Irish Rural Link (IRL), the national network representing the interest of rural communities, have raised concern at the level of households aged over 65 years old that have no internet connection of any kind.

Census 2022 figures published today, Thursday 27th July, on Housing in Ireland shows that while 83% of dwellings have some form of internet connection, 20% of dwellings headed by someone aged 65 and over have no internet connection of any kind. This rate is higher among this age cohort who are living alone at 34%.

IRL believe there are a combination of factors why the figure is higher among this age group. While the National Broadband Plan continues to be rolled out and more households in rural areas are being connected to high speed broadband, there is still a way to go for all homes to be connected. Also, the lack of digital skills among this cohort and having access to devices are the other main factors why there is low internet connection among this cohort.

Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown measures where older people ‘cocooned’ highlighted the divide in digital skills, access to broadband and digital devices among this age cohort. For many, getting online became essential for them to stay in touch with family and friends. At this time, IRL ran a ‘buddy system’ to help those who were cocooning get online and stay in touch with family and neighbours. IRL also delivered the ‘Getting Citizens Online’ programme for many years, supporting non-liners basic computer skills; from accessing the internet, sending emails, banking and other services online and internet security. Participants found the skills they learned extremely valuable and greatly benefited when lockdown restrictions were in place. This programme, funded by Department of Environment, Climate and Communications, finished in 2022. IRL continue to raise their concerns that older people with low or no digital skills will be left behind as more and more services move online and everything becomes more digitalised.

With more people remaining in their own home as they age, the technologies to support them to do so will need a certain level of digital skills and possibly internet connection.

More effort to support older people to have access to internet connection, the digital skills and devices is needed so they can get comfortable in using technology and are not left behind or further isolated from society.

While we in IRL welcome the roll out of the national broadband programme, we believe that the cohort of people in the over 65 bracket will need access to one to one training, if they are to maximise the benefit of having it available.

Ends

For further information, please contact (anytime):

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About Irish Rural Link:

Irish Rural Link represents the interests of locally based rural groups in disadvantaged and marginalised rural areas by highlighting problems, advocating appropriate policies, sharing experiences and examples of good practice. It has a membership of nearly 600 rural community groups dedicated to sustainable rural development and represents rural communities at a national and international level.

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